

## **NASW-NJ Testimony on A1504: Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill**

Issues of aid in dying for the terminally ill are issues of relevance to social workers, as we are often the front-line staff providing end-of-life planning and care for these individuals. Social workers providing hospice and palliative care are expected to develop specialized expertise in addressing issues of dying, bereavement, and cultural sensitivity to end-of life decisions.

The NASW policy statement, *Client Self-Determination in End-of-Life Decisions*, notes “Social workers have an important role in helping individuals identify the end-of-life options available to them ... **A key value for social workers is client self-determination. Competent [capable] individuals should have the opportunity to make their own choices**, but only after being informed of all options and consequences ... without coercion” (NASW, 2003). This bill allows for that choice.

The *NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Palliative and End of Life Care* also **emphasize client self-determination and protection of the vulnerable**. As such:

**NASW affirms the right of the individual to determine the level of his or her care.** Particular consideration should be given to special populations, such as people with mental illness, with developmental disability, individuals whose capacity or competence is questioned, children, and other groups who are vulnerable to coercion or who lack decisional capacity (NASW, 2004).

It is important to note, NASW-NJ’s support for this legislation is **contingent upon the maintenance of the proposed amendment that expands upon the types of mental health professionals who are permitted under this law to determine if an individual is capable of making decisions for him/herself**. The original language limits the type of mental health providers authorized to determine capability to psychiatrists and psychologists, whereas LCSWs (as well as other licensed mental health professionals) also possess the requisite clinical training and expertise to provide this type of service.

Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) provide the majority of mental health and counseling services to individuals in our state. There are more LCSWs practicing in New Jersey, than there are all other mental health professionals combined (SAMHSA, 2012). The New Jersey Social Work Licensing Regulations (NJAC 13:44-G-4.1) set forth educational prerequisites for all LCSWs in our state, which include **graduate level coursework in diagnosis and assessment**, among other areas.

Thank you for hearing this testimony. We hope you will take these recommendations under advisement and advance this legislation with these amendments.

## References

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